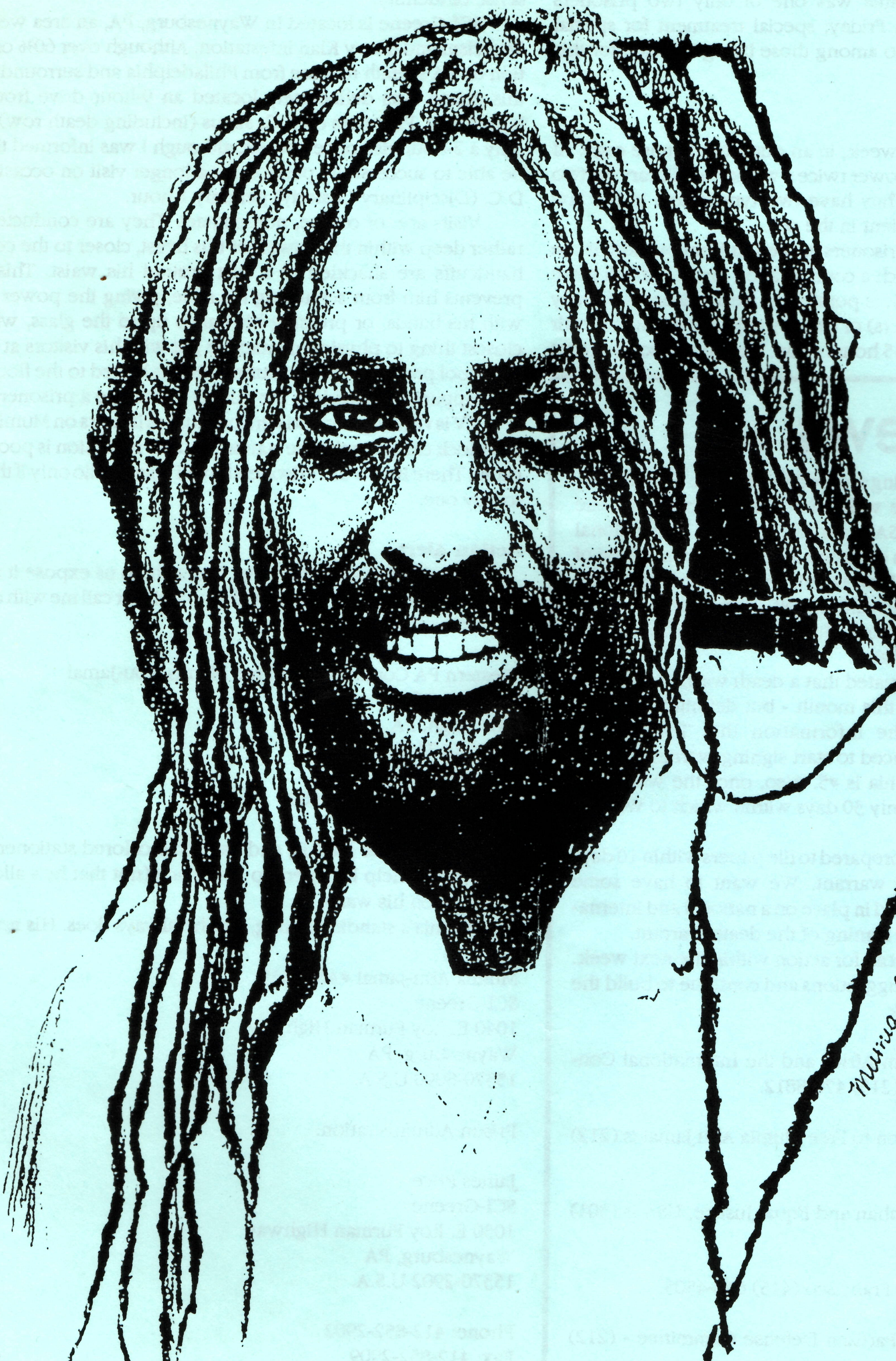
Mumia Abu-Jamal:
A Life Of Resistance


Mumia Abu-Jamal
L Whitehorn 1994
from a photo
by Jennifer Beach

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Update On Mumia's Present Situation

By Jamila Levi, January 19, 1995

I visited Mumia Abu-Jamal at Pennsylvania's new SCI-Greene Supermax yesterday, January 18, 1995. He was moved here from SCI-Huntingdon on January 13. About 70 of this state's 185 death row prisoners have been transferred to Greene as of this writing. Most were moved in groups of 14-20. Mumia was one of only two prisoners transferred from Huntingdon on Friday; special treatment for special people! Jailhouse lawyers are also among those being targeted for this supermax prison.

Basic Features

One hour a day, 4-5 days a week, in an outdoor exercise cage. At Huntingdon he got two hours. Shower twice a week. Law library for two hours once or twice a week. (They have two typewriters in the law library.) The remaining time is silent in the cell.

Utter isolation, from other prisoners as well as from outside, is the goal. The cells are arranged in such a configuration that it is much more difficult to see across the block. It is possible to hear prisoners directly above or below (there are two tiers) or directly adjacent through the air vent. The food slot is unlocked 4-5 hours a day. The door is solid except for a thin window. Silence prevails, acutely aware that every sound is monitored.

All doors are electronically controlled, with guards at control monitoring stations. Not everything is painted white as in some sensory deprivation units, but the overall atmosphere is one of complete sterility and lifelessness, clearly designed to break the spirit and destroy one's sense of identity.

SCI-Greene is located In Waynesburg, PA, an area well-known for its racism and heavy Klan infestation. Although over 60% of the population on PA's death row are from Philadelphia and surrounding counties, this prison was deliberately located an 9-hour drive from the state's largest city. Prisoners on A.C. status (including death row) are allowed only a 2-hour visit once a week, although I was informed that they may be able to successfully petition for a longer visit on occasion. Those in D.C. (Disciplinary Custody) get only 1 hour.

Visits are, of course, non-contact. They are conducted in an area rather deep within the bowels of this beast, closer to the cell block. His handcuffs are shackled to a belt around his waist. This contraption prevents him from scratching his nose, giving the power sign, talking with his hands, or pressing his hands up to the glass, which was the closest thing to physical contact he got with his visitors at Huntingdon. The stool provided for him during visits is bolted to the floor, with a ring on it apparently enabling the guards to shackle a prisoner to the stool.

TV is virtually non-existent because prisoners on Mumia's side of the cell block can get only one station, and the reception is poor. There is no cable. There is no VCR. Prisoners have TV and radio only if they can afford to buy one.

Action Alert

This place is a real bad trip. Please help us expose it right up front for exactly what it is. Please feel free to write or call me with any questions or comments:

Western PA Committee To Free Mumia Abu-Jamal
P.O. Box 10174
Pittsburgh, PA
15232-0174 U.S.A

Phone/Fax: 412-361-2989

Please, write Mumia, and use some colored stationery, pictures or whatever to help brighten up that place (not that he's allowed to have anything on his wall).

Mumia's standing strong, like he always does. His new address is:

Mumia Abu-Jamal #AM-8335
SCI-Greene
1040 E. Roy Furman Highway
Waynesburg, PA
15370-8090 U.S.A.

Prison Administration:

James Price
SCI-Greene
1030 E. Roy Furman Highway
Waynesburg, PA
15370-2902 U.S.A.

Phone: 412-852-2902
Fax: 412-852-2909

We urge you to call or fax Governor Tom Ridge now to say free Mumia Abu-Jamal and abolish the death penalty! His phone number is 717-787-2500. His fax is 717-772-3155.

Latest News...

Recently, there was a meeting at the office of Leonard Weinglass, lead counsel on Mumia's case with Jane Henderson and Noelle Hanrahan of Equal Justice, USA, Pam Africa of the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu Jamal, Jamila Levi of the Western PA Committee to Free Mumia, Rachel Wolkenstein of the Partisan Defense Committee and myself, Safiya Bukhari of the Coalition To Free Mumia Abu Jamal. This communication is to alert you to Mumia's current legal status.

At this moment it is anticipated that a death warrant could be signed as early as the end of this month - but definitely by mid-March. This is based on the information that Tom Ridge, Pennsylvania's governor, is paced to start signing warrants within the next week or so and Mumia is #5. Also, once the warrant is signed we anticipate having only 30 days within which to work to stay the execution.

Leonard and his team are prepared to file papers within 10 days following the signing of the warrant. We want to have some coordinated activity planned and in place on a national and international basis in response to the signing of the death warrant.

We will be sending out a call for action within the next week. Please contact me with your suggestions and continue to build the Emergency Response Network.

The telephone number to Pam Africa and the International Concerned Family and Friends is (215) 476-8812.

Safiya Bukhari and the Coalition to Free Mumia Abu Jamal is (212) 330-8029.

Jane Henderson/Noelle Hanrahan and Equal Justice, USA is (301) 699-0042.

Freedom Now Network - San Francisco (415) 648-4505.

Rachel Wolkenstein and the Partisan Defense Committee - (212) 406-4252.

Remember, we're all in this together. We all must work together to free Mumia.

Mumia Abu-Jamal:

A Life of Resistance

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a prominent Black revolutionary journalist and the only political prisoner in the United States facing execution. As a teenager, Mumia was a member of the Black Panther Party. And for years, as a journalist, he exposed the racist brutality of the Philadelphia police. On December 9, 1981, Mumia was shot, beaten, and nearly killed by the police in a street incident in which a cop was killed. Mumia was then framed up on murder charges and sentenced to die in a trial where he was denied even the most basic rights of legal defense.

Mumia has been on death row for over 12 years. And throughout his imprisonment he has continued to speak out against the system, bringing revolutionary truth to millions of people through his writing, in spite of attempts by prison authorities and others to censor him and break his spirit.

Mumia's case has become the spearhead of a racist campaign to restore the death penalty in Pennsylvania where no one has been executed since 1962. The attempt by the state to kill Mumia is a major escalation in the use of state violence against the people. And it is a move by the power structure to establish the death penalty as an accepted weapon against the revolutionary movement. The people cannot let the enemy murder this precious revolutionary brother! And the fight to prevent the execution of Mumia is now even more urgent with the recent election to office of a viciously pro-death penalty governor and legislators in Pennsylvania.

The Revolutionary Worker recently interviewed Mumia Abu-Jamal in the state prison at Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. This interview was conducted by Revolutionary Worker contributing writer C. Clark Kissinger. It appeared in RW #784 and RW #785 in December 1994. For in-depth information and a history of Mumia's case and the campaign to save his life, see RW #763 and RW #769.

RW: Mumia, you once used the phrase before that the police in Philadelphia saw you as "a target to be neutralized." What do you think is behind this campaign by the state of Pennsylvania to kill you? Why do they want to make an example out of your execution?

Mumia: Because to them and to other people I've become more than a living being, I've become a symbol (...) a symbol of resistance to the system. It is no accident that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in my prosecution - "persecution" - literally leaped back over a decade in time to tell jurors about my political background, about my membership in the Black Panther Party, about words I'd said, like "all power to the people" and "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" and "the Black Panther Party is a political and uncompromising party". These were quotations that the prosecutor very skillfully and very intentionally wanted to inject into the minds of a predominately white and middle class older jury. But the injection of those quotes was the injection of a reality that was over a decade old, and they used that as kind of an additional aggravating circumstance to call for my death and my execution.

RW: At the time of your arrest you were already very well known to the Philadelphia police, isn't that true?

Mumia: Even before I was a "mainstream journalist", I worked in the Ministry of Information of the Black Panther Party, and among my duties were the writing, the production, and the layout and the distribution control of newsletters, newspapers, and propaganda coming out of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther Party. At the risk of sounding obvious, the information that was put out by our office was less than glowing reports on the Philadelphia Police Department. In fact, they dealt with the real clear campaign of historical repression that had been happening against Black people and poor people in Philadelphia for years and years and years. I had been threatened as a Panther years ago. I had been arrested several times. Our offices had been raided. So I was not a nonentity - I was a known quantity even in my youth, in my teenage years.

RW: And this is the same Philadelphia Police Department under chief Frank Rizzo that not only raided and attacked the Panthers as in many other cities, but went out of their way to attempt to humiliate the Panthers publicly. I remember that photograph where they lined up a group of captured Panthers and made them drop their pants for a photographer.

Mumia: Yeah, drop their underpants. That was an intentional, as you say, humiliation, or attempt at humiliation, of the Black Panther Party, done at gunpoint by Philadelphia policemen on the orders of Frank Rizzo. That was the public attempt to tame the Black Panther Party. Of the many chapters across the eastern part of the United States, Philadelphia's was energetic, youthful, and had a very good relationship with the Black community and two supportive communities. And I think it's because of that, members of the Black Panther Party in Philadelphia were deemed as threats.

RW: And at the time of your arrest you had already begun to report on the MOVE organization (1), isn't that true?

Mumia: That's very true. I reported in kind of a vacuum because even though there was substantial and a good deal of reporting on the MOVE situation in Philadelphia, most of it was from a pro-system bias - a presumption of guilt bias, a pro-police, pro-prosecution perspective. When MOVE people said anything, if you looked in the Daily News or the Inquirer or the leading newspapers of the day, or the Bulletin or the Journal of those times, you would find that MOVE members said "a mouthful of rhetoric". That was always the pat phrase they would use when they were describing allegedly what MOVE people said. They wouldn't quote what MOVE people said. And I thought that not only was it politically dangerous, but it was 'journalistically inappropriate' to do so.

I mean, politicians live and die by rhetoric, however you can't open up a newspaper without getting an exact quote of what a given politician, be he president, mayor, police chief, or judge, says every day. So it was important from a radical journalistic liberation perspective to hear what they had to say and to report what they said in their own words. Because if they were taking that kind of stand against the most repressive police department in America, a police department that once was boasted by the mayor of Philadelphia as one capable of invading Cuba and winning, then I thought it was necessary that people hear what they had to say. And what they had to say was pretty god-damn compelling.

RW: You've pointed out a number of times that your only crime is that you survived - you were shot and almost killed by the police. I understand you had a police bullet enter your chest from above and go down at an angle into your lower abdomen or kidneys and ended up near your spinal cord. You had to either have been doubled over or on the ground when you were shot like that. How did the police treat you immediately after your arrest and at the hospital?

Mumia: I would not say "treat" me, I would say that they "beat" me. They beat me on the street. They beat me in the paddy wagon.

RW: This is when you had a bleeding chest wound from a gunshot, and they beat you?

Mumia: Bleeding from a wound that perforated a lung and my liver, that was life-threatening. According to a witness that testified at the trial, I arrived at the hospital, maybe two or three blocks from the scene, about 40 to 45 minutes afterward. So not only was I beaten at the scene, and beaten in the paddy wagon, they were driving me around the city of Philadelphia waiting for me to die.

RW: And what happened when you awoke in the hospital?

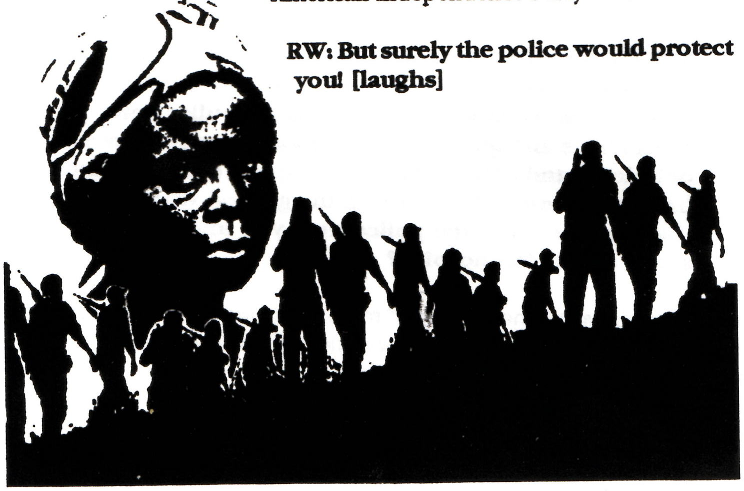
Mumia: This is post-operative. And what I felt was a pronounced real strong pressure, kind of swelling me up. I felt swollen, full. This was my first sensation of consciousness coming out of the operation. Despite the real sense of tiredness and fatigue, I forced myself to open my eyes. And I saw a policeman just standing over me, looking down in my face. About about 35, brown-blond hair, mustache. I didn't understand what was happening at first. I saw him looking down at me smiling a cold, grim, deadly smile.

Then, after what seemed like minutes but might have just been 15 or 20 seconds, he moved out of my range of vision and I felt a sense of relief as if a balloon had deflated in my abdomen. And he did this two, three, four times. Perhaps more. And even though I was handcuffed on this hospital bed, I was able to swerve my neck around and look and see that he was stepping on a urine bag, a clear plastic receptacle for urine, forcing that urine back up a plastic tubing and into my bladder. He was trying to burst my bladder while I was laying in a hospital just a half-hour or so after I had gotten out of surgery. Here I was, tied down, handcuffed in a hospital bed, in a hospital. Not in a prison hospital, but in a civilian community hospital, with a Philadelphia policeman with an Uzi submachinegun trying to kill me early that morning.

He continued and I couldn't do anything. I couldn't say anything because I had an esophagus tube stuck down my throat, I had tubes up my nose and other body orifices. All I could do was look at him. And he smiled, and he did it and he did it and he did it. I just laid back and watched.

RW: Well, let's go back to the beginning. Even before you became involved with the Black Panther Party, I understand that in 1968 you went out to picket against the racist George Wallace, when he was running for president against Nixon and Humphrey. The year that we had the choice between Tweedle-dee, Tweedle-dum, and Tweedle-dixie.

Mumia: Yeah, that's about it. That was back in the days when I really believed that the First Amendment and the other amendments meant that you had a freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of speaking your opinion. It was also in the days of the growth of Black Power consciousness in Black America. Me and four other guys from North Philly had the bright idea of going down to South Philly, which at that time was white ethnic Italian, and not a very healthy place for an African-American person of dark-skinned persuasion to be. Especially at night, and especially one should think at a rally for George Wallace of the American Independence Party.



RW: But surely the police would protect you! [laughs]

Mumia: [Laughs] Well, we thought so initially. Little did we know that they were there to protect others from us, and not us from others. We came, we demonstrated, and we were clubbed into insensibility afterwards by plainclothes police who never identified themselves as police, who put three of us in the hospital. We were 15- and 16-year-old boys from North Philly who got a lesson in constitutional law very quickly, very clearly. I remember going in front of the judge, half of my face swollen, the other half bloodied, looking up to the bench. And the judge, back in these days they were probably more racist and more twisted and corrupt than they are today, but the judge kept looking at me and looking at the cop who charged me (incidentally I was charged with assault and battery on a police officer), and said to him "Oh, he assaulted you, huh? This case is dismissed." And threw it out just like that. I mean that's almost unheard of, but it happened. Cuz it was very clear that when police beat people, they put assault charges on the victim.

RW: In fact, the worse you are beaten, the bigger the charge against you.

Mumia: The bigger the charge. Yeah.

RW: So how did the Panthers get started in Philly, how did you hear about the Black Panthers and what attracted you to them in the beginning?

Mumia: What really attracted me to the party was just reading. Someone had sent me a magazine called *Ramparts*. It had an interview in there about Eldridge [Cleaver]. There were several other articles in there, and I'd never seen anything like this before. That for me was a definite psychological hook, to see a group of young Black men fighting to defend themselves and their communities from police aggression. Knowing as I did precisely what police brutality was, I was sensitized, open to hear their appeal. A group of young guys got together and we began writing out to California to get copies of the Panther paper and we rented an office in the heart of North Philadelphia on what was then called Columbia Avenue.

RW: So you were one of the founding members in Philadelphia?

Mumia: Yes. Huey [Newton] used to say that the lifeblood of the party is the paper. It really was. It was through the paper that we were able to pay the rent and take care of the daily needs of the office and party members, and build the organization. Towards the waning years, after the national party kind of fractured, the party in Philadelphia had four or five offices around the city, and there were chapters in three or four different cities across the state. It was really a thriving, burgeoning young organization. And it was really because the paper gave a sense of cohesion, sense of consciousness, a sense of unity with a movement that was growing by leaps and bounds in the late '60s and early '70s.

RW: I remember at its peak the party was selling 40,000 a week in Illinois.

Mumia: Oh easy. I know at its peak the party paper nationally sold more than any other African-American newspaper, not just nationally but internationally as well. And they sold more than "respectable" national papers like the *African-American* which had bureaus in four or five cities; sold more than *Muhammed Speaks* of its time. It really, really was a paper that people looked for every week. And I think they looked for it because nowhere else in America could you read where a pig is called a pig.

RW: And had some flies around him.

Mumia: With flies around him! Our Minister of Culture, Emory Douglas, was a very creative, talented artist, who spoke to those who couldn't get into the more theoretical stuff. Very clear, punch-to-the-gut art. Political art. Revolutionary art that has never ever been repeated or bettered in the years since the party's apex.

RW: After the Panther Party, where did you go and how did you get involved in journalism?

Mumia: I think I got involved in journalism through the party, and not after it, because I worked in the ministry for so many years. It was people in the party, editors and deputy ministers on several coasts, who taught me the skills of writing. Of writing with a political bent. Of pushing radical ideas through words on paper. Of course, working in this chapter in Philadelphia, but also working in New York, working in California as well. So it was a kind of natural progression when the party was no more, the party had broken into splinters, to still be involved in a non-party but still radical ministry of ideas, a ministry of information. It's from that that the writing and the broadcasting really blossomed.

RW: It's interesting that it's still a battle today to get the revolutionary press into prisons across this country.

Mumia: Yes.

RW: It's kind of ironic, isn't it, that you are doing an interview today that you won't be allowed to read?

Mumia: [Laughs] I hope the interview's good, cuz I'll never see it! I guess my captors will enjoy it, but I won't be able to read it. The *Revolutionary Worker* has not been allowed since October 1987.

I got involved in journalism by being involved in radical, non-mainstream journalism. In fact, I think I would challenge that definition of not being mainstream. Remember we were talking about the circulation of the party paper? If the Black Panther paper was the most widely published and read paper in Afro-America, then how could it be anything less than mainstream? It was the mainstream. We were selling more papers than any other Black paper, and many white papers, in America. And people were reading that paper, because they would get stuff in there they wouldn't get anywhere else in America.

RW: What happened when you tried to report the trial of the "MOVE 9" in the regular press, and report it from the side of the people?

Mumia: Let us say that my bosses were less than happy. I remember once I was working for a white radio station in Philadelphia. I changed my name and I assumed a European accent, but I reported the same reality using a white name. It worked for a while. This station beamed to Kensington in northeast Philadelphia, white working class generally. These are people who from morning until night would never hear the voice of Chucky Africa [of MOVE] (...) until "William Wellington Cole" reporting for this radio station, got on a 10-speed during a lunch break, rode up to 33rd and Powelton, the old MOVE headquarters, and did a sound bite - a brief interview with Chucky and Janine. Went back, cut the tape, and put it in. I mean, this was news, this was during the time back in the mid '70s, around '76/'77, when MOVE was involved in an on-going conflict with the Philadelphia police department. They had a blockade, for Christ sake.

RW: This trial came out of a raid on their house in which the police shot each other in their crossfire, and then everybody in the house was charged with murdering a police officer. And since they couldn't pin it on any one person, they sent them all to jail for 100 years. You were trying to report on this and were censored.

Mumia: I was told, I remember being told at one station that I lacked commitment (...) This was the softest, sweetest firing one had ever heard of. My bosses called me into the office and said, "Look, Jamal, you've got great pipes. I mean, Christ, we don't know why you're not at CBS by now. You do good work." "So what did you call me down for?" "Well, we're going to have to let you go because we don't think you have the necessary commitment to the station." That was how I got fired.

RW: This was in the middle of the trial?

Mumia: No, this was actually before the raid, a full year before the August 8, 1978, raid. There was a blockade up, so for that year, if someone wanted the news, they would get the news that the regular white bourgeois press wanted to kick out. No one talked to the MOVE people. No one dared talk to the MOVE people. You talked to the police chief, you talked to the mayor, you talked to the district attorney...

RW: But it was forbidden, "verboten", to cross the lines and talk to the other side.

Mumia: Yeah! Well I don't think it was so much officially verboten as the presumption that the other side had nothing to say that was worth hearing. Almost a dehumanization of the other side, if you will. And I think that was what irked me the most. These were people, literally, with their lives on the line. And I think that's also what irked my bosses the most, because that part of Philadelphia wasn't supposed to hear those voices. That was one of my adventures in mainstream journalism.

RW: There were these stunning videotapes I remember seeing of the beating of MOVE member Delbert Africa. It was almost a precursor of the Rodney King incident in the way it affected people. People always denied that these sort of things happened, and there it was, captured on tape.

Mumia: Absolutely.

RW: How did the mainstream media deal with that?

Mumia: At first, the Philadelphia police commissioner at that time denied it had happened. I remember a reporter for Channel 3 said, "Well, is there a case where one of the MOVE members might have been beaten a little more violently, a little more aggressively, zealously?" "Oh, no, no, no. That's that MOVE propaganda." So the reporter kind of told him, "Look, man. We've got videotape of this." And they just went off. Assaulted the whole media. The way the system got off of that was to blame Delbert Africa for being beaten by police. They criminalized the victim.

RW: Delbert deliberately stuck his head under the boot of the cops.

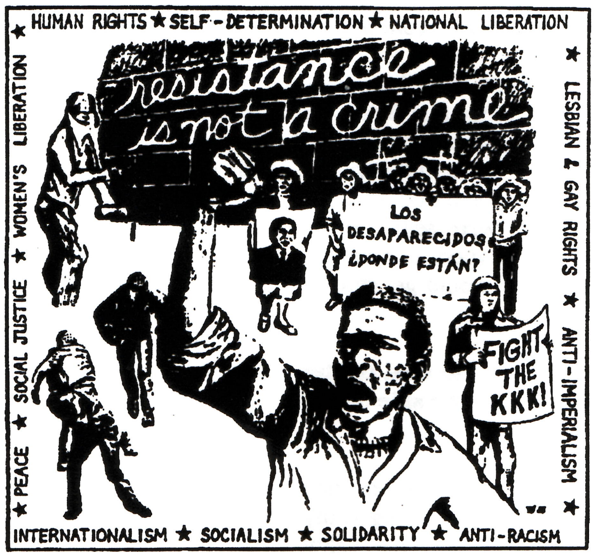
Mumia: Yeah, he deliberately assaulted the rifle butt with his forehead and his cheekbone. He deliberately destroyed pieces of concrete with his skull. Not only that, you have to remember that around that time because this was so undeniable, because it was a videotaped vicious beating of an unarmed African-American revolutionary, the system had to go to some motion to make it look like it was fair. So they actually tried three cops, there was four cops involved in the beating if you look at the tapes and pictures, but the three cops wouldn't say who the fourth cop was. So they could only identify three cops.

Three cops were tried for beating Delbert Africa, and a reporter who worked for a television station at that time got up, swore to the tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and so forth. And said that she saw a piece of metal which may have been a knife or a clip from an automatic weapon in Delbert Africa's hand when he came out of the basement and stood up in front of the police officers. This, despite the fact that you had very clear evidence on tape also, with him with no shirt on, hands and fingers spread, nothing in his hands. The judge ignored what was on videotape, used what this reporter had told him, ignored what he saw on print and photos and videotape, and said: "Delbert Africa came out of the basement armed, and therefore he threatened the police officers. Because he was in such extraordinary physical condition, the police were terrified and had to beat him into submission."

When I look at that, and then I look at Rodney King, it shows me how little things have changed in that span of time. And it also shows me that where they succeeded to a certain extent in dehumanizing Delbert Africa, they tried to dehumanize Rodney King. Oh, well, he was a convicted criminal. "He was speeding 150 miles an hour" - in a Hyundai, for Christ sake. I don't think the thing will go that fast. But they tried the same tactic, and it didn't work, because Rodney didn't have dreadlocks, and he wasn't political. He just happened to be everyman. And the reality is, it doesn't matter what your politics are. It doesn't matter how politically involved you are. It doesn't matter if you're radical or conservative. I mean Rodney King for all intents and purposes, when those cops came down and tried to beat him to death and attempted to murder him by blackjack in that street, could very well have been Martin Luther King the fifth, he could have been Jesse Jackson the third. No one knew who he was, they didn't know his name, they didn't know his record. They said "Nigger, you made us run. And we can do this."

RW: How do you see the role of the revolutionary press? What's the role of the revolutionary paper in making revolution?

Mumia: The role of the revolutionary press is crucial. Because, just by looking at the function of the press. The function of the press is not just to inform, but to create a consciousness of resistance, by continuously reporting on acts of resistance against the empire, but also continuously challenging the imperial structure itself. What happened in the '60s was a change and a shift in consciousness. And it's because people were growing into this new consciousness that they became hungry for the Black Panther newspaper. I mean they would read something in the Daily News or the Daily Times or the Daily Press, but they would read something else in the Black Panther paper that contrasted, contradicted, challenged, expanded, deepened the realities that they could not read in the regular press.


HUMAN RIGHTS ★ SELF-DETERMINATION ★ NATIONAL LIBERATION
★ LESBIAN & GAY RIGHTS ★ ANTI-IMPERIALISM ★
INTERNATIONALISM ★ SOCIALISM ★ SOLIDARITY ★ ANTI-RACISM
★ PEACE ★ SOCIAL JUSTICE ★ WOMEN'S LIBERATION
resistance is not a crime
LOS DESAPARECIDOS ¿DONDE ESTÁN?
FIGHT THE KKK!

The role of the press in bourgeois society, the so-called mainstream press, is to act as a bulwark for the system in which their so-called constitutional rights, First Amendment rights, freedom of the press rights, exist. That's why you will read certain things in the straight press that you will never read in the radical press. For example, when a defender of this system, a cop, an army soldier, an imperial leader, is killed or executed, that's front page news in the system's pages. But when the system executes someone in the street, that's page 19. That's back near the comics section, if at all. It's unimportant. You see what I'm saying? At the same time, the system will tell you that all life is equal, this is a classless society, everyone has rights, and everybody is the same as everybody else. Well, that's bullshit. Everyone is **not** the same as everybody else. And it's very clear that the role of the press in mainstream society, bourgeois society, is to support this system. That's its role. To support their privileges, to support this class, economic imperial structure.

RW: While you've been on death row, some very major things have gone down on the outside. There was the May 13, 1985 bombing of the MOVE house and the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion. How did you hear about those things, and how did they affect your mood and the mood of other prisoners? Do you remember the day you heard about the MOVE bombing?

Mumia: Sure. I believe at the time that happened I was doing D.C. [disciplinary custody] time and I wasn't able to see a TV. But someone was describing to me kind of point by point what was happening. It was devastating. It really was. I felt proud for those brothers and sisters who stood up, who rebelled, who resisted. But there's no way to look at that reality without also recognizing the success of the state in dehumanizing MOVE people to the extent they could use some selected neighbors to achieve their aims. And they could use the media to create a picture of mass murder and make it justifiable. And that's exactly what they did. To date, I might add, only one person involved in that complete, total mass murder, massacre, has ever seen the inside of a jail cell. That's Ramona Africa.

RW: Her crime was surviving.

Mumia: For surviving. For daring to survive. For not dying when they tried to burn her and shoot her and crush her to death under stone and brick. That's it. No cop, no politician, no fireman, none of them have ever been charged with a crime. In fact, this is one of the few cases where an investigating grand jury was called and was told not to indict. They called a grand jury, and then the district attorney returned a proposed submission to the grand jury, and it was "Do not indict".

I don't believe in this system. I think millions of people really don't believe in this system. They are forced to deal with it, the forces and oppression of the system. But they don't believe in it. In fact, people in the system don't believe in the system! I use the example of that guy Bud Dwyer. He was the third highest guy in the state government a few years ago. He was secretary of the treasury, or something like that. He was under federal indictment for some corruption charges, taking money from this big corporation. Bud Dwyer held a press conference, pulled out a .357 Magnum and blew the top of his head off. Here was a man that had been a lawyer, had been a legislator, and rose up through state government. But when it came time for him to choose whether he trusted that same system to determine his guilt or his innocence, his freedom and his liberty versus his incarceration, he chose death. I mean this was a very clear statement to me about how much faith he put in this system. And he spent his whole life being a part of it. So I say that to say I didn't expect justice from this system for the murders of May 13 and they didn't disappoint me.

As for the L.A. Rebellion, I think that's a harbinger of things to come. As a recent study showed, there are over 39 million people living in poverty in the United States. That's larger than the population of Canada. Most of the countries in the UN don't have that kind of population. But you have 39 million people, according to the latest census, living in poverty in the United States. That's a pool of discontent that must chill the spine of the ruling class.

RW: It was very striking in particular because the U.S. had just come out the victor of the Cold War and the conqueror of Iraq, and then in the space of two hours they lost control of the second largest city in the U.S., which fell into the hands of the people who live there, and it took them three days to mobilize enough troops to recapture Los Angeles. And that was a spontaneous rebellion.

Mumia: That's the key! This was unorganized. This was completely [snaps his fingers]. You know, it was people's hearts exploding in anger and rage.

RW: Some people in Washington must have been worried: Gee, suppose this had actually been organized?

Mumia: That's the key. You know what? When you look at it from that perspective, that is the impetus for that Crime Bill. That's the impetus for this law and order. You know, the biggest secret in America is that the crime rate is down. That by all indications, except for perhaps car theft, which is really an economic kind of crime, in all crimes affecting the person - burglary, rape, robbery, homicide - all crimes in America are down, and have been consistently for the last three or four or five years.

So they are not responding to "crime", they're responding to the perceived threat of resistance, of "L.A. 2", or "L.A. 4", or "L.A. 15." And that's really at the bottom of it.

RW: The political nature of your trial came out most intensively when the prosecution argued for the death penalty by bringing up your political associations. They argued, "Mumia Abu-Jamal, the dangerous Panther, radical and revolutionary, and MOVE defender" and all, has to be put out of commission here. I found it very interesting that the Supreme Court actually overturned that sort of argument for the death penalty in the case of a white supremacist in Delaware. Yet when you took your case up, after that, and made the same argument, the Supreme Court wouldn't even hear your case.

Mumia: Not only that, the real kicker with that Aryan Brotherhood case is that in the interim between me being affirmed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and him filing for relief in the United States Supreme Court and getting it, if you read the opinion from the Delaware Supreme Court, you'll find that there is one case that they use. They don't have any case on point from the whole Delaware precedent. They leap over to Pennsylvania and say, "Oh yeah, this is cool. Pennsylvania did it in this *Commonwealth vs. Abu-Jamal*, so we can do it. [wacks the table like a gavel] Affirmed. You gets nothing."

RW: So just to trace the logic again, the Delaware Supreme Court said: "We can use such testimony to argue for a death penalty, because they did it in Pennsylvania with regard to Mumia."

Mumia: Absolutely.

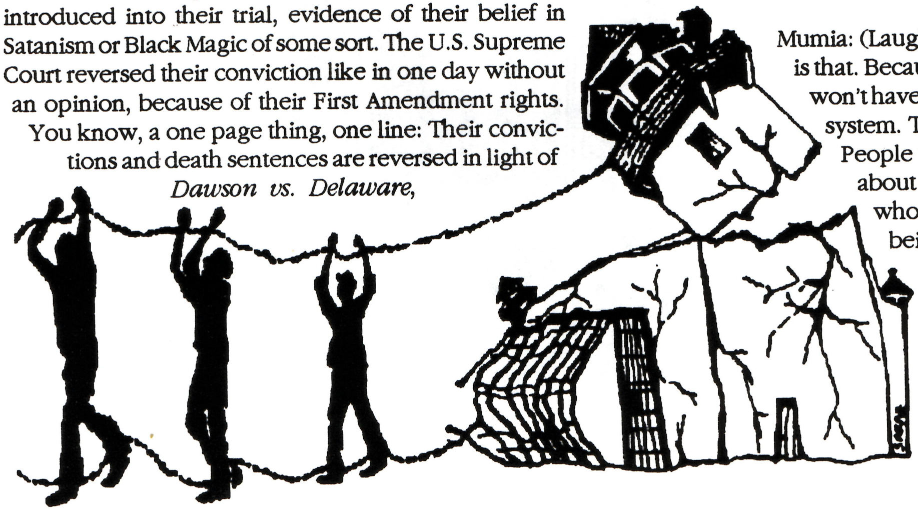
RW: Yet when the Delaware case was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court, the Supreme Court said: "No you can't." But when Mumia went to Supreme Court and said: "Hey, what about me?"

Mumia: They said, "No, *you* can't."

RW: How does your case fit into this current political campaign to extend the death penalty, to restrict legal appeals from death row, and in general criminalize Black youth?

Mumia: I think it's typical, in the sense that what the state has been saying, for all intents and purposes, is that in *Commonwealth vs. Abu-Jamal* the defendant has no rights. The right to counsel, the right to counsel of one's choice, the right to a fair trial by a jury of peers, the right to whatever. That would be denied, denied, denied, denied. This has been shown in my case.

As a human being, I would have been better off being an Aryan Brother, being a member of the American Nazi Party - there is a case out of Nevada called the Flanagan case, these were two fellows who were convicted of killing their grandparents or something like that. It was introduced into their trial, evidence of their belief in Satanism or Black Magic of some sort. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed their conviction like in one day without an opinion, because of their First Amendment rights. You know, a one page thing, one line: Their convictions and death sentences are reversed in light of *Dawson vs. Delaware*, which was the case of the Aryan Brotherhood. So I would be better off being an Aryan or something like that than being a past member of the Black Panther Party and a supporter of the MOVE organization. In essence, there is no greater crime that someone can commit in America than being Black and resisting the status quo. There's no greater crime.



RW: You've been on death row now for some 1-2 years. The officials have tried to break you, both in body and spirit. Yet what continues to come out in your writing is your deep connection with the people and your commitment to revolution. Our readers would like to know both how you have fought back on the inside for your rights, and what keeps you standing strong?

Mumia: I think an extraordinarily strong belief in structure. I'm a follower of the teachings of John Africa, as are MOVE members and MOVE supporters. John Africa teaches that "It is insane not to resist something that gives nothing but pain to you, your family, your mothers, your fathers, your babies." And when you think about something like that, there is so much wisdom locked into that little phrase. Contrary to popular belief conventional wisdom would have one believe that it is insane to resist this, the mightiest of all empires, the victor in the Cold War, the empire that devastated Iraq and all that. But what history really shows is that today's empire is tomorrow's ashes. That nothing lasts forever, and that to not resist is to acquiesce in your own oppression. The greatest form of sanity that anyone can exercise is to resist that force that is trying to repress, oppress, and fight down the human spirit.

RW: What have they tried to do to you here?

Mumia: Isolate, destroy, silence, cripple. I don't want to make it sound like what they are doing to me is unlike what they have done to millions of others. They've done the same thing. No doubt your pictures here and your words will describe this. This is the kind of visiting room for all visitors. If you were my lawyer it would be this visiting room. If you were my wife, my children, this would be the visiting room.

RW: No physical contact.

Mumia: At all, at all, at all. And the function is (...) human contact is necessary for human health, to survive. It was very clear their intent was for us not to survive.

RW: So you are living in a small room, like living in your own bathroom for 20 hours a day.

Mumia: 22 hours a day.

RW: And you get 2 hours out to exercise in a cage. And then you read in the newspapers that the politicians say we're coddling people in jails and we need to take away their television sets and their weight lifting programs.

Mumia: (Laughs) I love it! I love it! In fact, the best thing they could do is that. Because once they take away people's diversions, then people won't have anything to barrier themselves from the repression of the system. That day will come. And I think it's a good development. People will become more rebellious. They won't have to worry about what's on the soap opera. Or what's on Jeopardy. Or who's on Soul Train. They'll have to worry about themselves, being in direct conflict with a system that is trying to extinguish their lives.

Nothing happens in a vacuum. The prison movements of the '70s happened because of the movement in the streets, to be sure. But there is still a lot of consciousness that needs to grow in this place. And the more repressive they become, the more consciousness will grow. Back when I was a young Panther and I was writing for the paper, I wrote a quote called "Repression

Breeds Resistance." And it's still so. It's absolutely true. And the L.A. Rebellion proved that in the least expected places people will resist. I mean L.A. is probably one of the most repressive cities in America, with police versus the citizens. The helicopters, the bulldozers...

RW: The barricading of communities.

Mumia: Right!

RW: I don't know how much of a sense you get on the inside, but there is a virtual convergence of the conditions under which oppressed people live on the inside and the outside. The turning of housing projects into minimum-security prisons, the lockdowns of buildings, people required to wear ID cards to enter their own apartments, the building of barricades and fences. It's been what we sometimes call "the pigification of America".

Mumia: Yeah, I see that in a lesser degree, but I do see that. Part of that same reality, of course, is the Crime Bill that makes being a member of a gang an aggravating circumstance... As if the U.S. Army, the U.S. Senate, the state legislatures are not gangs of the rich, the gangs of wealth, the gangs of power. As if when those gangs went to Vietnam or went to Southeast Asia they did not rape and rob and pillage. As if they are not in power today as the result of the rape, robbery, and pillage of this continent from its original people.

RW: And they do drive-by shootings of whole countries.

Mumia: Absolutely. From the air. Fly-by shootings.

RW: I think one of the things that continues to impress people who read your work is, living under the conditions you live under, you are able to continue to practice your profession as a revolutionary journalist. Under the most trying conditions you still go out there and stick it to the system every chance you get. Recently you achieved national notoriety when National Public Radio contracted you to be a commentator on the program All Things Considered. Then they dropped you like a hot potato when police groups and the New York Times told NPR that wasn't such a swift idea. Even Senator Dole got up and denounced you on the Senate floor. How did you first hear ftom NPR that they were dropping you, and what did they say to you?

Mumia: You'd be surprised to learn that I never heard from NPR that they were dropping me. They haven't said anything to me. Very recently I did get a letter from a leading person in NPR, but I heard about this from one of my lawyers who called me and said, "Did you hear?" I said no, I hadn't heard anything, you're the first word. That's how I found out that I was persona non grata with All Things... well, maybe not "All"...

RW and Mumia in unison: "Some Things Considered!"

Mumia: I guess it was a real clear lesson for me of the limits of liberalism. How what passes for a left wing in this country is little more than a right wing with manners. I can't say I was surprised. I can say I was disappointed. Not surprised because the history of American liberalism has been couched in the velvet above the iron fist kind of situation. Not surprised because probably the most well-known liberal in America is President of the United States, because he had the political wherewithal to execute a brain-dead Black man. So in that context, I wasn't terribly surprised. I just think that it's very clear that when some people go around talking about considering all things, that all things are still not considerable.

RW: What's happened with your mail and your communications with your lawyers and getting support from the outside?

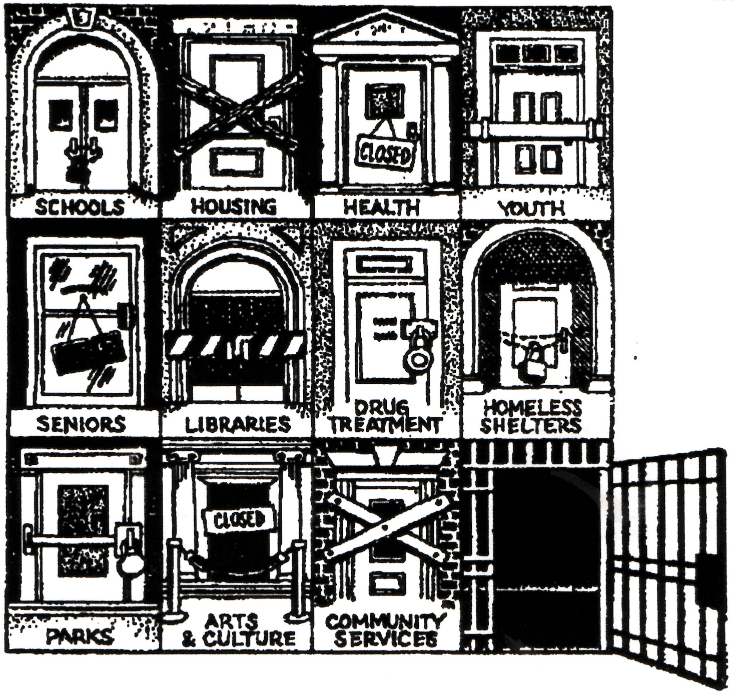
Mumia: As a direct consequence of the NPR fiasco, and political repression coming from politicians in Pennsylvania and in Philadelphia, all of my mail has been severely restricted on the pretext that it might contain illegal funds for me; I might be operating a business from death row. This has included letters from supporters with no money in it that have been held for over a month. When I complain about it, they say, well, three or four days. They just don't acknowledge the fact they've held the letter for 28 days. This has included a letter from my lawyer with material on my case that has been opened, sealed, and then delivered to me some 8 to 11 days afterwards. And they say, "Oops, we made a mistake." They blame me for the volume of mail I have when I complain about it. "Well, you have so much mail we couldn't tell the legal mail from the regular mail." Here's a letter with my lawyer's name, title, and address, "Legal - Confidential", the whole deal.

Again I have to go back to what I said to you earlier about not being terribly surprised. The government has never given a damn about my right to counsel. That's why I was assigned the counsel I was assigned to and refused the right to represent myself. So that now that I have a lawyer, they want to make sure that so-called confidential communications are non-confidential.

RW: A lot of people were deeply moved by your 1992 commentary on "The Lost Generation". You talked about the intense alienation of today's youth, and made the striking remark that they are yet the most aware generation since Nat Turner's. Could you talk about your views of today's youth and their revolutionary potential?

Mumia: I think their revolutionary potential is greater than my own, and our own, of our generation. Because in a sense they have access to more information. The former Minister of Education for the Black Panther Party, Eldridge Cleaver, said, "Information is the raw material for new ideas. If you get misinformation, you get some pretty fucked-up ideas." The point is, because of the profusion of Afrocentric radical books out there, information is available that was not available years ago.

Black youth are using their life experience, how they live today in the real world, and molding a form of art, rapping - an art of their own creation, a music that comes from their spirit, their beat, their syncopation, their lived reality, instead of recreating something that happened before. And talking about in real clear graphic terms their lived reality. The only thing lacking is organization. But as consciousness rises, the necessity for organization must arise as well. Their potential is almost unlimited, because for many of them their fathers and mothers and grandmothers and grandfathers were the Panthers, were the people with the RNA [Republic of New Afrika], and so forth. I have pretty good hopes ...



for those kids. I really do. That's why I wrote in the piece "The Lost Generation" that they're not "lost". They are lost to the extent that they have been shoved aside by those of their fathers' and grandparents' generation who are too bourgeois to give them what they need. To equip them with the tools which they need to rebel against this state.

But also this is a far more repressive time than the '60s were. The '60s represented a moment of opening. What the generals would like to call "a window of opportunity". But it was a window of opportunity for those who resisted the system. That window has been all but shut in this age. I mean that's what the Crime Bill represents. That's what the death penalty represents. That's what the incarceration of Black America represents. That's what the imprisonment of the poor represents. That's what homelessness represents. So the threats against them are greater, and therefore they have a sense and perception of this system that is more real than ours was.

Before our generation really came to consciousness, we believed, "Our country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty", you know, the whole nine yards. We believed because we were taught and told to believe. And it was only when reality, cold reality of a blackjack or a pistol slapped into our faces, that we were able to see, well, it's not like that. Well, this generation of the young now have almost been born into that brutal reality. And they know what this thing is about. They don't have the information, they don't have the organization, but they have a potential right now of turning their lived reality into a revolutionary reality. They really do.

RW: And the repression going on right now actually comes from a strategic weakness and fear of the other side...

Mumia: Yeah.

RW: My impression is, having lived through both periods, that the system is actually weaker today than it was in the 1960s.

Mumia: I think so. I think that when the state erects the edifice of security, when they build the wall higher and higher, that is a testament to its insecurity as opposed to its security. I think that when politicians have to run on death and run on iron houses and jail cells, that is a testament to the ruling class fear of what the poor, what the discontented, what the alienated will do if repression continues. So when a state has to run on threat and terrorism, then those are the seeds of destruction of that state.

RW: To come back to your case, the demand of your supporters is for a new trial - really, for a first trial. This is obviously a political as well as a legal struggle, with the government seeking to extend the death penalty to political dissenters. The courts are even arguing that people who have used up their appeals should be executed, even if new evidence comes forward that shows they are absolutely innocent.

Mumia: What the courts of America are showing is that there is no law, there's only process. There's only process. There's only the stage and showmanship of law, not its essence. Because there's no justice. There's no balance. There is not even a scent of an equation. I remember making the point to a lawyer friend of mine. We were talking about the L.A. cops, and the same system that says you can have only one appeal and the presumption of finality, this is the same system that when it wants to prosecute someone will prosecute you in state court, and if they don't get what they want, they'll do what they did with Lemrick Nelson in New York. They'll come with a federal prosecution, and tell you through its mouthpieces that this is not double jeopardy. When clearly the person being prosecuted is in jeopardy by two entities, by the state and by the federal government. But this is the same entity that talks about finality, but they don't want it to be final if you win in state court, if they get enough pressure to try to take you under again.

RW: This December [1994] will be the 13th anniversary of your incarceration and the 25th anniversary of the police assassination of Fred Hampton, who was Chairman of the Black Panther Party in Illinois. A lot of people now see the "informal executions" of the '60s turning into the formal executions of the '90s. What is your message to those organizing to stop the legal lynching of Mumia Abu-Jamal?

Mumia: My thanks to them, first of all, for their good and radical work. Second of all, don't give up the fight. I continue to write. I continue to resist. I continue to speak truth to power. I continue to rebel against the system that tried to kill me 13 years ago, and continues to try to kill me today. I know that for some people 13 years ago, depending on your age of course, is an eternity ago. For others it seems just like yesterday. What should be clear to everyone, no matter what your perspective, is what happened about a year ago, the NPR flap, should make it very clear to anyone that this government that tried to kill me in December of 1981 still wants me silent and dead today. So the struggle continues. The fight continues. As Fred would say, "The beat goes on."

Notes:

(1) MOVE is an organization of predominately Black radical utopians in Philadelphia. MOVE refuses to respect present-day America and its prevailing values. Its members openly defy official power and preach against a system they consider utterly corrupt and destructive of life on this planet. Since its inception in 1972, MOVE has been viciously attacked by the cops, various authorities, and the mass media. Before dawn on May 13, 1985, the Philadelphia Police Department launched a massive assault on a MOVE house on Osage Avenue in Philadelphia. At 5:25pm, 11 MOVE people were murdered - six adults and five children - when a Pennsylvania state police helicopter dropped a bomb on the house. Only 30-year-old Ramona Africa and 13-year-old Birdie Africa managed to survive.

Send contributions for the legal defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal to either.

Bill of Rights Foundation (marked "Jamal")
740 Broadway
New York, NY
10003 USA

or

Black United Fund
Mumia Abu-Jamal Defense Fund
419 S. 15th Street
Philadelphia, PA
19146 USA

Arm The Spirit

Arm The Spirit is an autonomist/anti-imperialist collective based in Toronto, Canada. Our focus is on political prisoners, national liberation struggles, armed communist resistance, anti-fascism, the fight against patriarchy, and more. We regularly publish our writings, research, and translation materials in our magazine called *Arm The Spirit*. For more information, contact:

Arm The Spirit, P.O. Box 6326, Stn. A,
Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1P7 Canada
E-mail: ats@etext.org

All Of Us Or None

Slave, who is it who shall free you?
Those in deepest darkness lying,
Comrade, these alone can see you,
They alone can hear you crying.
Comrade, only slaves can free you.

Everything or nothing. All of us or none.
One alone his lot can't better.
Either gun or fetter.
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.

You who hunger, who shall feed you?
If it's bread you would be carving,
Come to us, we too are starving.
Come to us and let us lead you.
Only hungry men can feed you.

Everything or nothing. All of us or none.
One alone his lot can't better.
Either gun or fetter.
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.

Beaten man, who shall avenge you?
You, on whom the blows are falling,
Hear your wounded brothers calling.
Comrade, come, we shall avenge you.

Everything or nothing. All of us or none.
One alone his lot can't better.
Either gun or fetter.
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.

Who, O wretched one, shall dare it?
He who can no longer bear it
Counts the blows that arm his spirit,
Taught the time by need and sorrow,
Strikes today and not tomorrow.

Everything or nothing. All of us or none.
One alone his lot can't better.
Either gun or fetter.
Everything or nothing. All of us or none.

- Bertolt Brecht